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THE TROLLS' CHRISTMAS

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SCENE I

(A cozy room. Christmas Eve. The Christmas tree stands lighted in the middle of the room.)

Six children, the father and mother are singing and dancing around the tree when curtain rises.

Song—"This Tree Was Grown on Christmas Day."

1st Child—Hush! I think I hear St. Nicholas at the door!

(Children run to the door.)

All—No, not yet.

2d Child—It was only the wind.

3d Child—I do wish he would hurry up and come.

4th Child—Let us tell stories while we wait.

5th Child—I'll tell you a story. Come, let us sit under the Christmas tree.

(Children group themselves under the tree. 5th Child recites, "'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house," etc., until the line, "I was sure 'twas St. Nick." A loud knock at the door; all the children get up, run to the door calling.)

All—There he is, there he is; open the door.

(Enter St. Nicholas nodding and smiling.)

6th Child—Oh, I'm so glad you have come!

1st Child—We've been waiting so long.

2d Child—Are you cold?

3d Child—You must be tired.

4th Child—Come to the fire.

5th Child (brushing off the snow from St. Nicholas' coat)—Oh, you dear, kind St. Nicholas, what have you brought to us?

St. Nicholas (looking from one to the other)—Well, have you all been good children?

All—Oh, yes!

St. Nicholas—Then you shall all have *something*, but I have only half as many presents for you this year as I had last.

Children—Why?

St. Nicholas—I came through the North country, there I peeped into many homes and I found children who had little to wear, little to eat, and no Christmas presents at all. I gave half of your gifts to them. Did I do right?

Children (except 1st and 2d Child, Axel and Lottie by name)—Of course you did right.

St. Nicholas—(looking at Axel and Lottie)—Didn't I do right?

Axel—Last year I had twenty presents, and this year I'll have only ten.

Lottie—And last year I had thirty presents, this year I'll have only fifteen. The trolls will have a better Christmas than we.

Axel—Yes, I'm sure the trolls will have a much better Christmas than we.

St. Nicholas (looking sadly from one to the other)—Very well, if you want to see the trolls' Christmas, come with me. (*Grasping each by the arm, hurries out with them. They resist and call:*) Oh, no, no; let me go, let me go.

(Children, father, and mother run after them.)

Father and Mother—Axel! Lottie!

Curtain.

SCENE II

(The foreground of the stage represents a forest, snow on the ground and on the pine trees. Back of the trees, and not seen when the curtain rises, is the trolls' cave. Darkness. Enter St. Nicholas with Axel and Lottie.)

St. Nicholas—Here you are. I have other and pleasanter business to attend to.

(Exit St. Nicholas.)

Axel (peering around the trees)—Lottie, where are we?

Lottie—St. Nicholas has left us; we are all alone. (*Wolves are heard howling.*) What's that awful sound?

Axel—O, sister I think it is the wolves howling.

Lottie—Axel, I'm afraid, oh, so afraid, and it is so dark, and I'm so cold.

Axel—Let us see if we can't find a house. Come sister you must be brave.

Lottie—I am so tired, Axel, I can't go far.

Axel (*who has been hunting for shelter among the trees*)—There, look there. I think I see a cave among the rocks. It will save us from the wolves at least. Come, Lottie, come!

(*The forest is removed. Children are seen entering the cave. They scream.*)

Lottie and Axel—The trolls!

SCENE III

(*The trolls' cave. Darkness. King and queen of the trolls on thrones. A number of trolls sitting in a circle in front. Axel and Lottie crouching in a corner. Servant passes refreshments.*)

Troll Queen—I like snakes best. Ah, king, this spider was delicious!

1st and 2d Troll (*fighting*)—This snake is mine. No, mine, mine. I'll have it!

3d Troll (*blowing*)—This icicle is hot!

4th Troll—Stop stroking the cat, it makes it so light it hurts my eyes.

King (*rises*)—This is our great holiday. It is getting colder and colder, darker and darker. Soon there will be nothing but ice and snow in the world, and no light at all. Then we, the trolls, shall rule the whole world.

Trolls (*clapping hands*)—Hurrah, hurrah, we, the trolls, shall rule the whole world.

King—Send for the messenger.

(*Enter Messenger.*)

King—What did you see?

Messenger—I saw a faint glow in the east.

King—Go back and watch again.

(*Exit Messenger.*)

King—Let us dance.

(*Trolls caper about in a circle to Grieg's music, "In the Trolls' Hall."*)

King—Send for the messenger.

(*Enter Messenger.*)

King—What do you see now?

Messenger—No light at all, perfect darkness, perfect darkness.

All—Good, good, perfect darkness.

King—Now let us have a merry song.

Trolls (singing)—

Oh, who is so merry, so merry hi, ho,
As the gay little troll, hi, ho, hi, ho,
He dances and springs
To the tune that he sings
With a hey, and a hi, and a ho!

(*All turn summersaults. Messenger comes running, face covered by hands.*)

Messenger—Oh, Oh!

Trolls—What is the matter? What is it? Speak, speak!

Messenger—A light in the east! A bright, shining light I saw. It has blinded my eyes, I cannot see.

King—What can that be? Who can tell us what that means?
(*Silence.*)

1st Troll—There, see, there are some children from the world; ask them.

King (beckons to Axel and Lottie. They step before him)—I can turn you into wolves, or frogs, or snakes if I please, but if you can tell me what that light in the east is, I'll let you go.

Axel—It is the star of Bethlehem.

King—What does that mean?

Lottie—It means that a babe was born this night, and he is the light of the world.

King—What is this baby's name?

Axel and Lottie—Jesus Christ.

(*Light enters the cave. Trolls' moan and fall to the ground turned to stone.*)

Axel—Look Lottie, look, the trolls! The light has turned them to stone.

Lottie (feeling them)—And they are icy cold.

Axel—Lottie, what shall we do?

Lottie (looking and pointing to the light)—The star, the star shall lead us home!

(*Children walk hand in hand looking at the light.*)

Curtain.

NOTE—The children of the Third Grade of the University Elementary School assisted in the making of this play. They had been studying the beginnings of trade and commerce as seen through the voyages of the early Norsemen, the climate, the character of the country, and the industries and customs of the people today. They had been told something of the Christmas festivities and of the customs that mark the season. They had also been told many of the old folk-tales from which they had gathered the Norse conception of the troll.

The troll takes the place of the Jotuns of more ancient myth. The Jotuns were the spirits of evil; they were known through cold, darkness, and winter death, while the heroes of Asgard were the powers of light, warmth, life, and goodness. When Christianity became the religion of the people the trolls gradually assumed something of the rôle formerly played by the more powerful Jotuns. The trolls are small, mean, mischievous spirits. They are little men, dwelling near to men in the forest or in the hills. The Jotuns were terrible and great, and dwelt afar off in the icy mountain heights. As in the old myth, the smile of Balder could overcome the evil Jotuns, so in later tales the sun or light is the force which can annihilate the troll power; or, as the tales symbolize it, "turn the trolls to stone."

From the most ancient days the people celebrated the coming of Balder, the turning of the sun again to the earth, and the beginning of returning warmth and life. The Christian religion did not utterly reject, but assimilated some of the old customs and reanimated a few of the old symbols in its Christmas festival which falls at the same time of the year as the older festival.

Among the stories told the children were "The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon," and "The Trolls in the Hedal Forest," as told in

Popular Tales from the Norse, by Dasent. The play is freely adapted from a modern story by Zacharias Topelius.

The music used for the scene in the troll-king's palace is Grieg's "Troll-Dance." The music of the Brownie song is found in Reinecke's *Fifty Children's Songs*, and the Christmas song is "The Christmas Tree," by Myles Foster, and is found in the *Primer*, "Modern Music Series," Silver, Burdett and Co., publishers.—EDITOR.